

[O. T. Cardwell]

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Folkstuff - Range Lore 4,125 Words

EDITORIAL FIELD COPY

by

Mrs. Florence Angermiller, P.W.

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From F. C. by

Mrs. Gussie Hale, P.W.

Tales of Early Days. UVALDE COUNTY, DISTRICT #10

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O. T. CARDWELL

Uvalde, Texas.

O. T. Cardwell, who lives on 502 South Getty Street, and ranches out near Spofford is active and up and going inspite of his 77 years. He seems to greatly enjoy being in the cattle business and is very capable. His parents who were farmers, first lived in Caldwell County where he was born in 1861, then they moved to Gonzales in 1861. The following is in his own words:

“At the outbreak of the Civil War, I was too young to remember war times, of course, but soon after, felt the effects of it. I was the youngest of our family of four boys and two girls. There were thirteen other children besides, that my mother cared for during the war. She took care of them till they were old enough to make their own way in life. Their fathers had been killed in the war and their mothers had died of grief or hardships. It was necessary for my mother to take a count on the children of nights and I well remember the touch of her hand on my forehead at night when she came to our beds to take her count. I remember the old trundle bed that was pulled out from under my mother's bed and three to five of us youngsters tucked in for the night.

“One night, the count was one short. Mother could not find him. She roused the little army of kids and sent us out in search of the lost one. We had been playing 'Hide and Seek,' and this one had hid himself so well that he could not be found. The play had gone on without him and he was forgotten but not by mother when she took the count. When we found him, he was covered up in the corner of the fence with some rubbish he had pulled over himself to hide him and he was dead to the world in slumberland. C12 - 2/11/41 - Texas

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"However, every night was not a night of play for the children. The older ones were usually kept busy. That was in the day before we had gins and we smaller children would sit up many a night picking seed out of the cotton, while the others would be carding bats or running the spinning wheel or throwing the shuttle for mother as she sat at the old loom making clothing for us children. Why, if the girls could get a calico dress, they were far more /proud of it than they would be today of their silks and satins.

"A woman's work in those days was never done. They never had many conveniences and it is marvelous how much work they could turn off. Soap had to be made. Cheeses were made besides the butter and curds and other things they fixed. That soap-making was lots of trouble. My father had made a hopper out of a log by hollowing it out. There was a trough underneath to catch the drippings to make lye. Many a bucket of water I've carried and poured in that hopper. She would take that lye, then, that dripped through the ashes and make soap out of it.

"My oldest brother would sit at the sewing machine when he came from the field at noon till dinner was ready. Then after we ate, he would go back to the machine and sew till the others were ready to go to the field. The rest of us was cutting wood or 'tending to the horses or shucking corn.

"I never had any Indian experiences myself, but I remember hearing my mother tell about an incident that happened in their community one time that I thought was rather exciting. The Indians had made a raid in the neighborhood. All the men had gone scouting and the women folks had been left in a log cabin. Well, along in the night, the women heard a strange noise in one side of the cabin which was built 3 with a small window just large enough for an ordinary man to get through. Old Grandmother McCurley opened the door and as she did, she saw an Indian about half-way through the window trying to pull his way inside. A pair of scissors was the most convenient weapon she could find, so she took them and run and caught him by his long hair and stabbed him three times in the back and killed him. He fell backward outside. The other Indians outside took him off about two-

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hundred yards from the house and buried him. Someone later found his carcass and they knew it was the one she had killed with the scissors.

"I looked after my father's stock, for he never liked to work with stock but turned his time and attention to farming. I worked with his stock till I was seventeen years old and he said to me one day, 'Son, I am in debt so you get out now and make a little money for yourself, so you can finish your education.' So I spent three years trying to get an education and also sent my two sisters to school.

"In my [?] younger days, I had a lawsuit testing the rights of some horses I had taken a mortgage on. The case was decided in my favor. When court adjourned for dinner, my contestant said, 'Well, you won the case.' I said, 'Yes.' Then he said, 'By swearing a d--- lie!' I knocked him down and he rose with his six-shooter drawn but he was overpowered by others and disarmed. The next day, I was in town and rather hurriedly galloped up in front of a drug store. I threw my bridle reins over the hitching post and ran on into the store. My man was in there. He told me afterwards that when he saw me come running and jump off of my horse and come on into the store, he thought I was after him. He jerked his gun. I caught it before he leveled it on me just above the cylinder. It was an old-time cap and ball pistol. Three shots were fired but the only damage that was done was a bad powder burn on my wrist and a badly-scared drug-store man. I had taken the gun from the fellow just as the sheriff came in. He laid a heavy hand on me, marched me across the street, opened the jail door and shoved me inside. When he closed the door and started off, I said, 'Wait a minute. Are you going to keep me in here all night?' He said, 'Do you think I would turn a man loose when he has attempted to commit murder?' He turned to go again and I said, 'Captain, you had better hear what I have to say before you go, or you may not live to hear it after I get out of here.' He said, 'Tell it d--- quick!' I told him he had the wrong man but he said he heard three shots and took the pistol away from me. I said, 'It was the other man's gun.' He asked me if I could prove it and I told him I could if I had a chance so he unlocked the door and gave/ me my freedom. He interviewed the drug store

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proprietor then told me to go home, but to appear at 9 o'clock A.M. next morning. They fined the other fellow for disturbing the peace and let me go.

“Three years later, this fellow and I met in a lonely by-way. We both began to slow up but never stopped until we got in arms' length of each other. I said, 'Sam, I heard you were tired of carrying this trouble between us.' He said, 'I am.' Our hands met in a friendly clasp and we laid our guns away.

“When I was about twenty-three years old, I was married to Miss Frankie Lowry. This was in '84. We settled down on a 1,500 acre farm close to Gonzales and I also traded in the cattle business for five years. But the boll weevils was so bad and cotton went down to three and five cents a pound. I didn't give up. I turned my whole attention to the stock business and I managed to pay off the lease on 2 the land that way.

“When I was about twenty years old, a man named McCulloch told my brother four years older than me, that if he would move him west he would give him a yoke of white oxen he had. Well, my brother was married and had a family, and didn't want to make the tripe. He asked me if I would like to go. I told him I would. It was a pleasure to me to get out and see the country. McCulloch was moving to the Thompson ranch out near Eagle Pass which was a big sheep ranch. When we reached the ranch what interested me most was, when the boys came in at night to the ranch house, there was a big table in the living room and they would unbuckle their six-shooters and throw them on this table. And the whole table would be covered with six-shooters. It was different to anything I had been used to. I thought, 'My Lord, I've got into a regular outlaw den. But they were all very nice.

“As we came through Uvalde, the Southern Pacific Railroad was just being built here. There had never been a passenger train here at the time. The Mexican teamsters were passing through with freight headed for / the west. So when they went to drive their wagons across the railroad ties they hit it sideways with the wagon wheels and stalled their team. Well, they tried and tried and could not get across. They had the road so I

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had to wait till they got out so I could go on. I got out of my wagon and watched them and wondered why they didn't get out and cut some of that mesquite brush end build up to the top of the ties so the wagon would roll on. They had eighteen mules to the front of the wagon so they hitched sixteen to the back and this way they pulled the wagon back and forth for an hour and couldn't get it across. They finally took the lead mules off and pulled the wagon 6 back thirty or forty yards and made a pull and hit it straight and went over. I liked the country so much that I said if I ever came west, Uvalde would be my home, and I always kept it in mind.

"When we reached Old Man Thompson's , he told us we would have to go seventeen miles up the river where Mr. McCulloch was located. But while I was talking to Mr. Thompson I learned that wagons were in demand for hauling wool from San Felipe to San Antonio. You know there wasn't any Del Rio then; it was before there was ever any Del Rio there. Anyway when I reached San Felipe I was disappointed for there was no wool there. They told me to go to a ranch about forty miles from there and I would find plenty of wool. But I had gone far enough. I didn't care to go any farther and turned back.

"On my way back I had staked out my horses one night and sometime in the night, they broke loose. I thought sure they were gone for good that someone had stolen them in the night. You can imagine about how a kid would feel away out there in that lone country with a wagon and no way to get away. But the horses came into camp next morning while I was eating breakfast. I sure felt good when I saw them coming in.

"Old Man McCulloch had furnished me provisions to get home on and I only had 45¢ in my pocket and when I reached the Gaudelupe River I had to be crossed [in?] a ferry boat and that cost me thirty-five cents. So I had a dime in my pocket to get home on. But I reached home all right; you didn't have to have so much money those days to travel.

"Sometime after that trip, I took charge of my father's farm. We had open range then and I had to gather cattle for Captain George Littlefield. He was a big stockman and was moving

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his stuff to Brady, Texas. And in connection with my farm and ranch business, I bought 7 cattle for the Union Meat Company of San Antonio.

"In my early experience of cow driving I felt like I had to have a big outfit and put on a big show, and handle cattle just as everyone else did. But experience has taught me later that fewer men and a smaller outfit could be more successfully handled than such a big outfit. And later in life, I learned that one man could do the work of an outfit, do it just as successfully with a very little expense. On one occasion I had gathered without the aid of anyone, six-hundred and seventy-five head of Mexico steers in one of the bushiest pastures in southwest Texas in less than a weeks time. Now some people won't believe that but I have living witnesses and can prove it.

"I have had lots of experience in the cattle business and of course I have seen quite a few runs in my life. I remember once one of our neighbors back in east Texas had come west and bought six-hundred head of big steers and was taking them back east to feed out. So about the sixth day, the cattle began to get draggy and the man were all getting tired. Mr, Wells had an old Negro working for him, his name was Sam Price/ and he was a great favorite of Mr. Wells. Well, this Negro and myself was behind bringing up the cattle and we passed an old five-gallon can on the side of the road and this Negro roped it and tossed it over in the herd. Some of them kicked it and it began to rattle and of course we had a run. We rounded them up five miles from there in the forks of the Gaudelupe and San Marcos Rivers. After we got them to going again the boss came around and asked the reason of the stampede. When he came to Sam and asked him he said, 'I done it, boss.' 'How did you do it, Sam?' 'I roped an old tin can and throwed it in the middle of them.' Mr. Wells said, 'You black devil you, if it had been any other man in the outfit I would have fired 8 him.' And turned and rode off.

"Once back in Sequin, a man named Thad Miller was feeding six-hundred head of big steers in pens and every night they would stampede. He phoned me at Gonzales to come up there and I went and he told me what was happening and said he couldn't stop them.

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That he had even hung a bunch of lanterns around on the pens and that didn't do any good. I told him all I knew for him to do was to get out and buy up two or three carloads of bulls and put them in the pens with the steers. The bulls were of a restless nature and some of them, would go walking around the pen all night bellowing and that seemed to quiet the herd. So he did that and never had any more trouble.

"Once two other boys and myself were moving some cattle from one pasture to another. We had gotten over near one corner of the pasture where another herd was grazing when we noticed a cloud that had suddenly come up. So I told the boys to ride over there and turn them the other way so if we did have a run, they wouldn't all get started and run together. That left me there with about two-hundred steers to drive by myself. Well, after they left, there came a loud crash of thunder and they began to run. I managed to stay with them till the other boys got there but they had run two or three miles already.

"Not so very long ago, I was feeding out a bunch of calves and had gone down to the pens to feed one evening and all of a sudden those calves stampeded and run over me and knocked me down and broke a lot of wire and fence posts down. When I got up and looked around to see what in the world had happened, I saw a polecat trotting across the pen. I said well, I didn't blame them much.

"When I moved to Uvalde, I was running from the boll weevil and got caught in a western drought and have not been able to get away. When I first came here, I worked with Crowley Perrian Commission Company and 9 the Commercial National Bank employed me to gather cattle for the A.B. Dockery estate. On one occasion, we pitched camp near Batesville. I had Billy Lewis, Jim Dockery, Frank Parsons, Alvin Blalock and others with me. There was an outlaw bull that had outwitted us on our former workings and he came bellowing near the camp. Billy Lewis said to Jim Dockery, 'If you will let me have old Jack, I'll get that bull.' Jack was a famous roping horse of W.H. Parsons, Jim's father-in-law, and Jim had the horse in his mount. Jim gave his consent and Billy saddled up and rode out for the fun. Billy was successful in his cast, but caught too dead a hold around the

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neck, instead of the horns. The neck/ hold is much harder to handle on a bull than a girl. So when the bull hit the end of the rope, the off-strap of Billy's saddle broke and Billy and saddle went up in the air. Billy was all arms and legs as he went over but the bull went to the brush like a kite in the air with Billy's saddle holding the string. The boys trailed a short distance and found the saddle where the rope had hooked over a snag on a tree. The rope was broken so the saddle was brought back to camp and dropped down a short way from the camp fire. Everything got quiet toward night and the boys made down for a night's rest. A neighboring dog raised a howl and a mad wolf was suggested. One of the boys declared he could smell him, finally all of them could smell him. Then they could see him. A gun was called for but none in camp had one. They could see him moving around and the last one of them rolled up in their tarps, head and ears, waiting for further action.

"I had fitted myself out with a hammock and had it well swung between two trees so I took it on myself to stand watch for the boys. I kept my eyes on what I thought they had mistaken for a mad wolf. It was in the glimmer of a campfire, but never did move. I finally called to 10 the boys and told them it was a false alarm. Two of them summoned courage enough to venture out to the thing and drug Billy's saddle in to camp.

"I worked seven years soliciting loans and inspecting cattle for Dover's National Bank of Kansas City, Missouri, and during that time, I never lost a loan. I don't know if I deserved the credit or the cowmen.

"I believe I have served my county in the capacity as a juror as faithfully as any men living today. I served as foreman in Gonzales County before I was thirty years old; later, as foreman of the Federal Grand Jury in San Antonio. And I served as foremen of the grand jury in Uvalde County too many times to remember, also foremen of the Federal grand jury in Del Rio three times. At another time I was summonsed as a grand juror. I had had my foot broken by the fall of a horse, but answered the summons on crutches. The judge sent me a note asking me to lunch with him. He asked me why I was there on crutches? Didn't I know that was a legal excuse. I told him I did but I was so tired of lying around home

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I really wanted to get out. He said, 'Well those crutches saved you from being foremen again.'

"On another occasion, I was summonsed to serve on the grand jury, but I had sold a big bunch of steers to go to Kansas grass and had set the time to deliver them. Later, the same day, I was summonsed to appear for jury service. I rendered my excuse to the sheriff but the judge would not accept it, and fined me. I refused to pay the fine and was cited to appear before the next term of court, to show the reason why, if any, the fine should not be made final.

"When the next term of court met, I was there. My case was called and the judge asked me if I had a reason to offer to the court why I did not appear as I was summonsed. I told him I had. Then he said, 'You and Judge Harris (who was district attorney at the time) will have to fight it out!' Judge Harris being a good friend of mine, I eased out of the court room, found Judge Harris and stated my case to him. He said he would be upstairs in a few minutes and get the judge to remit it. I went back to the court room and Judge Benny saw me and asked if I had seen Judge Harris. Of course, I did not care to let him know I had but told him yes. He said, 'What did he say?' I told him. Then he said, 'I told you you had this fine to pay.' He said Joe Davenport paid his and I had mine to pay. I told him, 'Joe Davenport is one man and O. T. Cardwell is another. Then he said he ought to fine me for contempt of court. I arose and told him I didn't agree with him as I had been cited to appear before the court and I felt like I had a right to defend myself, but if the court was fixed in its opinion and no evidence would change him, then it was useless to take up any time of the court. But if there was no law by which a citizen could protect his private affairs it was high time our law-makers were enacting some. The good old judge smiled and said, 'I will remit your fine.' I said, 'Thank you.' and walked out of the court room. Judge Benney was a politician and in a few days he came to me put his arm over my shoulder and said, 'We had some very important matters to come before this grand jury and I did want you as foreman.

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"I was sheriff of Uvalde county in 1910. Nothing exciting occurred during that time, but after serving that one term I quit, for I saw that I could not serve in a public office and do my duty to the public and attend to my private business. And I couldn't give up the cattle business.

"As sheriff, I had one little interesting event come up in the court room. Frank [Fisher?] was on trial for bootlegging. So Old attempted to impeach me. He asked me if certain things were not true. I told him no. He twisted the question around two or three times and then said, 'Mr. 12 Cardwell, it is a fact, and why don't you admit it?' I asked him if he knew it to be a fact. He said, 'Yes.' I said, 'You knew a lie.' So he picked up a big law-book and threw it at me and I dodged it and he grabbed up a chair and I jerked it from him and fell across a table, but I soon got to my feet and demanded order in the court room. Judge Milam fined us both for contempt of court. So sometime later, Judge Milam told me he was in a tight and when I asked him why, he told me Judge Old had not paid his fine and he did not want to impose on me to collect it. I told him it would be a pleasure to me. For Judge Old and I were the best of friends.

"For the past 27 years I have ranched at Spofford. I am 77 now and if I can live 77 more years no telling how much knowledge I will have in regard to/ gathering cattle. My father lived to be 84 my grandfather 97 and my great-grandfather 114 and if I can overlap him, it will be plenty.

"I have many a good friend here and elsewhere too. I lost one in February. And I prized his friendship. He was J. C. Swift of the Live stock Exchange in Kansas City. He had lots of dealings with them, borrowed money, shipped to them, paid it back and borrowed it back. He has been out here and visited me many a time. Here is a letter he wrote me in December before he died:

Mr. O. T. Cardwell,

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Uvalde, Texas.

Dear Friend:

As we travel through the country there are always a few rugged landmarks that stand out, and as I have traveled along through life I have been privileged to know quite a number of rugged characters that have made an indelible impression on me and have unconsciously served to stimulate me to greater endeavor.

You are one of them. And you may have forgotten all about the time 13 you had the accident and broke your leg and I came to your house just two or three days afterwards, expecting to find you in bed, and they told me you were out in the pasture looking after the cattle, then after awhile you came riding in, one foot in the stirrup and the broken leg in splints and just as useless as no log at all; but there was not any moaning, nor whining, nor plea for sympathy, and I went away from there saying that that was the kind of man that helped this country in its pioneer days - and I am glad I have been privileged to know you.

With best wishes for the holiday season and the New Year, I remain Yours, Sincerely

J. C. Swift

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